New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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1950 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
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Listed alphabetically are the names of actors and actresses in shows opening during the year 1950. The number opposite the name indicates the pages on which each is found in NEW YORK THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS. We regret that we cannot include the various cast changes, but can only give the opening night casts as published in the New York newspapers.

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"An Enemy of the People"

The New York Times

December 29, 1950

Fredric March in 'An Enemy of the People,' Adapted by Arthur Miller

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Papa Ibsen has had a shot in the arm. Taking a literal translation of "An Enemy of the People" as the source material, Arthur Miller has made a new adaptation, which was put on at the Broadhurst last evening. Next to "King Lear," it is the bitterest play in town, and it is also a vast improvement over the lugubrious Archer translation that for years has represented Ibsen to us in English.

Without a knowledge of the original Norwegian, no one can tell how much of the surface of the drama is Ibsen or Miller. But the theme of the honest man standing for his convictions against the mob is pure Ibsen, angry and defiant. It is Ibsen speaking a good word for the truth of the individual and shaking his fist at society. Since it falls into none of the current political categories, it is a stirring thing to hear in the theatre and a good deal fresher than most of the political thought of today.

* * *

By dispensing with the previous English translation, Mr. Miller has released the anger and scorn of the father of realism. But don't overlook the passion that the current performance contributes. For Robert Lewis has directed it with the fury of moral melodrama, and Fredric March plays it with a breadth and volume that are overwhelming. You may find the impact too stunning, since it calls attention to itself. Sometimes it makes you uncomfortably aware of the mechanics of the acting and the arbitrariness of the playwriting. But no doubt that is a matter of personal taste. For you can hardly escape the power and excitement of a bold drama audaciously let loose in the theatre by actors and stage people who are not afraid of their strength.

* * *

Ibsen was mad all the way through when he wrote "An Enemy of the People." Having just written "Ghosts," he was regarded as an enemy of the people himself. Instead of being frightened by the attacks, he was provoked to vengeance. "An Enemy of the People" is the horrifying story of a man who is persecuted by his townspeople for telling them the truth. Dr. Stockmann has proved that the water supply in his town is polluted. Instead of hailing him as an industrious public servant, the whole town turns against him, stones his house, abuses his family and boycotts him from society.

Reasonable people may complain that Ibsen was overwrought, and fastidious craftsmen may regard his play as contrived. It is a polemic no less than a drama. But, again, those objections are beside the main point. Ibsen had a savage case against society, and he stated it furiously. It is a case that cuts across party lines and hurts everyone. Ibsen stood alone against mankind when he wrote this trenchant drama.

There is none of the sweetness of pure reason in the acting. Mr. Lewis' direction pits the black against the white, and makes a fight out of them. As the embattled Dr. Stockmann, Mr. March gives an enormously rousing performance in a part that he probably respects. The brush-strokes are sweeping, but the moral integrity stands back of them. Florence Eldridge plays the less ferocious part of the wife with a pleasant womanliness that acquires conviction as the play develops. For the character of Mrs. Stockmann sharpens with the experience of the play, and Miss Eldridge's acting sharpens with it.

The impact of Mr. March's acting is dramatically balanced by the rich, forceful and accomplished acting of Morris Carnovsky as the cynical mayor of the town. Art Smith gives an amusingly flavorsome performance as Dr. Stockmann's crafty father-in-law, and knows how to put the heat on the drama when the proper moment comes in the last act. There are excellent performances also by Fred Stewart, Ralph Dunn, Martin Brooks and Anna Minot.

* * *

Living in a more prodigal era of the theatre Ibsen required quite a lot of scenery. Aline Bernstein has provided both the scenery and the costumes with the purity and lucidity that inform all her work. Those are about the only things in "An Enemy of The People" that are not dark and stormy. For Papa Ibsen was discharging thunderbolts in all directions. Mr. Miller has abetted him ably.

"AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE"

Play by Henrik Ibsen, adapted by Arthur Miller; staged by Robert Lewis; settings and costumes by Aline Bernstein; presented by Lars Nordenson at the Broadhurst Theatre, December 28, 1950. The cast:

Morten Kill.....Art Smith
Billing.....Michael Strong
Mrs. Stockmann.....Florence Eldridge
Peter Stockmann.....Morris Carnovsky
Hovstad.....Martin Brooks
Dr. Stockmann..Frederic March
Morten.....Ralph Robertson
Ejlif.....Richard Trask
Capt. Horster.....Ralph Dunn
Petra.....Anna Minot
Aslaksen.....Fred Stewart
The Drunk.....Lou Gilbert

Synopsis: Act I. Scene 1. Dr. Stockmann's living room. Scene 2. The same, the following morning. Act II. Scene 1. The editorial office of "The People's Daily Messenger", afternoon. Scene 2. A room in Capt. Horster's house, evening, two days later. Act III. Dr. Stockmann's living room, the following morning.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 29, 1950

Ibsen Play Turns Stage Into Soapbox

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Sociological drama.
Topic—Individual rights.
Script—New version; revival.
Treatment—Vigorous.
Issue—Freedom of speech.
I Find—Much mind, little heart.

In his new English version of Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" Arthur Miller has freed the play from literal translations and expressed it in workable vernacular without marring its original form.

Any modern application of its theme must allow for changes in social ideology and political vocabulary in the 70 years since it was written.

Ibsen wrote about a then new, scientifically provable fact. The waters around which a small town has built elaborate curative springs are discovered to be polluted. The discovery is made by the same doctor who first conceived of the spa.

Pariah by Choice.

Something of a dreamer and certainly an idealist, he tries to make the truth public, and advocates alterations in the structure. The fight begins when the local authorities, and through them, the people, learn what expense and delay the alterations will involve.

Desperate to reveal the truth, at any cost to himself or his family, the doctor finds public opinion turned against him from every direction. Finally he elects to stick out the life of a pariah, and to educate some young illiterates to make them true liberals.

There will be floods of talk about this play, in connection with the political application of its arguments, according to modern philosophical conflicts.

There is much in it which can be pointed to as genuinely supporting healthy liberal thought. And there is much that can be construed as implying that only the muzzled underdog knows any truth worth listening to.

Two Faults.

For me, the present production has two very serious faults. Even in the less animate presentation which Walter Hampden did of this play, one got the feeling that here was an intense and terrible tragedy of the most personal sort imaginable. In the current performance, for some reason, there is an air of soapbox about the proceedings which never for a moment let me feel emotionally involved in the troubles of these people.

A little child, bloodied by his schoolmates, remains a most objective sort of case history, instead of stirring your feelings.

The second fault lies in the physical depiction of the principal antagonist, the doctor's brother, who is mayor of the town, and who manages to deny him the right to speak to the people. He is shrewd and selfish, short sighted, and a chronic status quo man.

Monocle and Cane.

When he appears in a monocle, fur collar, gold-headed cane and high silk hat, he is a "Have" treading on "Have Nots" of the ilk that used to grace show-boat melodramas. Ibsen surely would have disapproved shifting the emphasis from the character's mental rigidity to his lush living.

Fredric March gives a most earnest portrayal of the Doctor, zealous in every move, and rising to practically an operatic climax in the big town meeting scene. Florence Eldridge is warm and true, as always, in the small part of his wife.

Morris Carnovsky plays the Mayor in a low key which makes him most insidious. Art Smith is the doctor's father-in-law, who takes advantage of the trouble by buying up stock in the spring, and Martin Brooks plays a vacillating newspaper editor. Fred Stewart is effective and touching as the publisher.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
December 29, 1950

Henrik Ibsen and Arthur Miller

By Richard Watts Jr.

Arthur Miller's adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People," which opened at the Broadhurst last night, is an earnest and impassioned tract for our time, preaching the right of an unpopular minority to advocate its possibly objectionable views against the hostility of public opinion. Because Mr. Miller is a contemporary playwright and Ibsen a now respectable classic, it is easy to assume that the application to today of a drama written for the Norway of 1882 is entirely the result of the American's activities, but any such assumption is a little unfair to both distinguished dramatists.

I haven't done my homework on "An Enemy of the People" with much care of late, but I can tell you of at least one case in which a speech that the suspicious might believe had been added for the present occasion actually comes right out of the original. When the crusading Dr. Stockmann tells of his plan to go to America and then wonders if things will seem just as bad there as they are in the old country, the scene is not a fancy added by Mr. Miller to make an ironic point for a present-day New York audience. It really was, unless an earlier translater is deceiving me, written by embattled old Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen on Editors

The drama's scornful assault on liberal editors who hastily change their point of view when the going gets tough is likewise not an addition thought up by the author of "Death of a Salesman." Ibsen was pretty mad at the Norwegian editors of his day for their treatment of his then radical social plays, and he took it out on them with characteristic vigor in his somewhat autobiographical "An Enemy of the People." Thus the current adapter is perfectly justified in stating that any similarity to be noted between the Norway of 1882 and the America of 1950 is purely coincidental.

This is not to deny, however, that Mr. Miller has been interested in emphasizing what he does find to be a coincidence. So far as I can recall, the one time that he has been somewhat cavalier in his treatment of the Ibsen original is in his toning down of the Norwegian's views about the moral elite of the world, as represented by his hero, and their aristocratic superiority to the prejudices of the mob. Otherwise he has stuck closely to the story of the scientist who finds that the spring from which the wealth of his community is coming is polluted and is declared an enemy by the people for telling them the uncomfortable truth.

The Adaptation

"An Enemy of the People" is, I think, by no means one of Ibsen's best plays, and I doubt if Mr. Miller has added to its timeliness by adding such colloquialisms as "burned up" and "lousy." But, in general, he has written a smooth and vigorous adaptation that lacks the kind of mannered pedantry to be found in earlier translations. And, after a rather desultory opening, the play catches considerable dramatic fire in the scene in which Stockmann faces the hostile mob at a mass meeting and in the closing act. There is something undeniably impressive in this passionate defense of the right of the individual against mass pressure.

Fredric March, who has the title role, gives a vigorous and earnest performance, being particularly effective in his scene of defiance to the mob. Florence Eldridge does well what little she has to do as the loyal wife, and there are good portrayals by Morris Carnovsky as the protagonist's chief foe, Art Smith as a grasping ancient, Ralph Dunn as a stalwart sea captain, Fred Stewart as a timorous publisher, and Martin Brooks, who was so fine in Mr. Steinbeck's "Burning Bright," as the liberal editor who recants. Robert Lewis's direction is properly vital. It is interesting to note the timeliness of Ibsen, but, on the whole, I would rather see Mr. Miller writing his own plays.

DAILY NEWS
December 29, 1950

Arthur Miller and Fredric March Put New Anger in Ibsen's 'Enemy'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

When Henrik Ibsen wrote "An Enemy of the People" 68 years ago he was, as usual, good and mad—and a great many people were, as usual, good and mad at him. The drama then had a personal quality; it was Ibsen fighting what he considered to be the stupidity of the majority, and it was alive.

In the last couple of decades the play has had occasional revivals in New York and it has seemed to be no more than an interesting piece for the student of modern drama. Last evening "An Enemy of the People" was again presented at the Broadhurst — and this time it was no curio from the dawn of the modern drama. It was intensely alive and intensely angry, with Fredric March throwing all his great resources as an actor and, I felt, much of his inner self into the role of Dr. Stockmann, the man who will not compromise when truth is concerned.

An Artful Adaptation.

Arthur Miller has made a new adaptation of the play, and seems to have put his own creed of intellectual liberalism into it without tampering with the intent or content of the Ibsen original. The time of the action of the drama still is the 1880s, although the program does not state a definite time; but the dialogue is modern. Occasionally it is odd to hear a phrase like "Well, what do you know?" in the quaint Norwegian surroundings Aline Bernstein has devised for the action; but it has been Mr. Miller's purpose to make "An Enemy of the People" once more trenchant and vigorous, and his skill at making characters talk like people has not recently been surpassed.

First-Rate Acting.

Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann, brother of the mayor of a small Norwegian town, is in charge of the town's main source of income—its healing waters and baths. Dr. Stockmann discovers that the water is polluted, and believes that when he carries this message to the people there will be a great demand for municipal reform. He never gets to first base. The press is refused him and so, even, is his right to speak up in public. His job is taken from him, his home stoned and taken from him, his wife, daughter and sons have been put in physical jeopardy. If he will but turn from the truth and follow the dictates of his wealthy, powerful brother, the mayor, his life and livelihood can be restored to their former security. But Dr. Stockmann won't quit; as the last curtain descends, with an angry mob shouting outside the house, he has just begun to fight.

Mr. March reaches great heights of impassioned playing as his Dr. Stockmann battles the forces which are trying to silence him by branding him a traitor to the people, and as Stockmann battles the people themselves for their stupidity. It is another excellent performance by an always excellent actor. Admirable, too, is Florence Eldridge, as the doctor's wife.

Robert Lewis, the director, is right with Miller and March in giving new life to a drama written by a great and angry playwright. His staging is always adroit, and the final moment of the play is highly dramatic visually.

Mr. Lewis has had many good actors to work with. Art Smith is splendid as Mrs. Stockmann's crafty old father. Morris Carnovsky fairly exudes the villainies of reaction in the role of the mayor. He sets the character early by fairly sneering, "We have tolerance in this town. We have it because we believe in the same thing."

A very appealing performance is given by Anna Minot as Stockmann's schoolteacher daughter, and other well-presented characterizations are given by Michael Strong, Martin Brooks, Ralph Robertson, Richard Trask and Ralph Dunn.

Ibsen wrote "An Enemy of the People" as a political or sociological tract, as he did most of his dramas. Arthur Miller and the company at the Broadhurst have made it a political or sociological tract once more. And it's a disturbing play.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 29, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Ibsen Plus Miller

ARTHUR MILLER has collaborated with Henrik Ibsen on a vigorous, eloquent and somewhat elusive drama at the Broadhurst. His adaptation of "An Enemy of the People" follows the essential outline of the Norwegian classic, while attempting to give it provocative contemporary meaning. He is far more successful in translating the work than in reconstructing its fierce defense of individual liberty in present day terms. Despite the staunch peforming of Fredric March, Florence Eldridge, Morris Carnovsky and their colleagues, the production is very much like a nineteenth century canvas given a Picasso treatment.

* * *

Certainly the crusading Dr. Stockman, his loyal wife and his bureaucratic brother, created in 1882, speak with far more authority and color in Miller's version of "An Enemy of the People" than they ever have before in English. It is when the brilliant author of "Death of a Salesman" tries to append his notions to those of Ibsen that the Broadhurst offering becomes a bit confusing and even hysterical. Instead of a physician intent upon spreading the truth about the pollution of the supposedly healthy waters in his town, a figure emerges who is part Galileo, part a man who refuses to testify whether he is or is not a Communist.

* * *

The form and context of the original drama were far better than they are in the present reworking of the plot. When it is "An Enemy of the People" that is being presented, all is well at the Broadhurst. March plays Dr. Stockman with considerable flamboyance, but the part lends itself to a bravura reading. Miss Eldridge is excellent as the troubled wife, who has to choose a life of disgrace and ruination in order to support her man. Carnovsky is quietly effective as the doctor's brother, who would rather break him than see a lucrative spa destroyed, and Martin Brooks is fine as the liberal editor who sides with the Mayor when the chips are down.

* * *

Robert Lewis has staged the work adeptly against splendid settings by Aline Bernstein, even succeeding in getting considerable movement and color into the long speech-making scenes. That these got out of hand on more than one occasion is the fault of the adaptation rather than the projection of the drama. Miller has taken the simple theme of Ibsen's indignant drama and broadened its focus to take in present day events. The stretching reaches the breaking point, or rather, leaves the play ungainly. It is an interesting idea, but not particularly successful. Incidentally Art Smith, Ralph Dunn and Anna Minot are helpful in the performance.

Journal American

December 29, 1950

Everything Is Fine But Ibsen's Idea

By JOHN McCLAIN

This has been, lately, a period of revivals and the one they staged at the Broadhurst Theatre last night was "An Enemy of the People," by a Norwegian nipper named Henrik Ibsen. Fredric March and his wife, Florence Eldridge, are starred.

Here you have a most perplexing proposition. A respected doctor in a Norwegian town decides that the water from which his village hopes to build itself into an international Spa is polluted. His brother happens to be the mayor and, representing the interests which may profit by such an arrangement, seeks to repress adverse publicity.

The doctor tries vainly to get his story set in the local sheet and, when that fails, calls a mass meeting at which he is virtually silenced and discredited by the mob on hand. Subsequently, his life and that of his wife and family are made miserable by the antipathy of the townfolk.

With all respect to Mr. Ibsen I find this an implausible premise, and I don't like the moral. Through it all there is a lot of talk about democracy and the fact that we must let "the people" decide important questions.

So when the people assemble, in a proper democratic meeting, they decide that they don't even wish to hear the doctor's story. This is nonsense. If the doctor is not an acknowledged imbecile, which Mr. Ibsen has gone to considerable pains to prove he is not, they would listen to him. If he is, they ought to lock him up and not write plays about his delusions.

On the bright side of the agenda, however, is the fact that Mr. March proves again that he is one of our most gifted and capable actors. Likewise can be said for his bride, for Art Smith, Morris Carnovsky, Martin Brooks, Ralph Dunn, Michael Strong and a new doll named Anna Minot.

I thought Arthur Miller did an excellent job of adapting and modernizing the play. The people speak in a thoroughly colloquial tongue, and move and perform rationally, thanks to Robert Lewis, the director.

"An Enemy of the People," lest you get me wrong, is magnificently written and performed, but I happen to be personally prejudiced against a show which slyly makes a bum of our accepted way of life, especially at a time like this.

Daily Mirror

December 29, 1950

'Enemy of People' Muddled In Version by Miller

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In adapting Henrik Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People," Arthur Miller has turned a stilted problem play into a rip-roaring, muddle-mooded melodrama. The new version was done for Lars Nordenson, who brought it to the Broadhurst Theatre last evening. The new arrival is interesting, if not always effective.

When much younger, we campaigned for operas in English. Later, after having heard some of them sung in our tongue, we decided it hadn't been such a good idea after all. Then we thought Ibsen and Strindberg ought to be re-translated in less stuffy terms. But now we're not so sure.

We seem to recall that "An Enemy of the People," as presented by Walter Hampden in a conventional edition, had stature and dignity. Miller's adaptation seldom has either of these qualities. We wonder what the dour Henrik would think of the slang which has been injected into his script. He might, for instance, shudder at having even the objects of his indignation referred to as "meat-heads."

Ibsen conceived Dr. Stockmann as a literate, enlightened and honest man fighting for scientific truth and the ultimate welfare of his community. When he found that the medicinal springs in his town were polluted, he used every possible method to awaken his fellow citizens to their peril. He was stunned when even the radicals and liberals joined the bureaucrats, in a compact majority motivated by self interest, to denounce him as an enemy of the people.

Though his own brother and father-in-law led the fight against him, though his house was stoned, though his "friends" deserted him, the doctor refused to flee. He courageously decided to defy the real enemies of the people, to establish a school in which he hoped to educate the young to appreciate the truth.

Fredric March was eloquent and stirring when facing the misled at a disastrous town meeting and when besieged in his own home, but we thought him pedestrian in the earlier and especially colloquial passages. Morris Carnovsky played his brother, the shrewd and unscrupulous mayor, with an unctuous melodramatic flourish that was fascinating. He gave us an idea of what our better stock villains used to be.

March and Carnovsky made the rafters ring in several of their scenes. Patrons of nearby theatres must have wondered if Vesuvius were in ruption again. As for the first-nighters at the Broadhurst, they appeared to be thrilled by the pyrotechnical display.

Art Smith, Florence Eldridge, Ralph Dunn, Fred Stewart, Anna Minot and Martin Brooks got everything from their roles required by director Robert Lewis. Michael Strong, who was so excellent as the thug in "Detective Story," was unable to make much of a sketchily drawn charlatan.

The Lewis staging missed fire, we thought, notably in the first act. This was not altogether his fault, for he had to project Miller's attempt to state a drama of protest in the jargon of a modern underworld thriller.

We trust that Miller won't apply this technique to "Oedipus Rex" at some future date.

"Captain Brassbound's Conversion"

Daily Mirror

December 28, 1950

Shaw's 'Capt. Brassbound' Sparkles Delightfully

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The New York City Theatre Company, under the artistic supervision of Maurice Evans, launched its 1950-51 season last evening at the City Center with George Bernard Shaw's "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." Though the comedy, in our opinion, is one of Shaw's lesser works, it has enough wit and wisdom to make it well worth reviving.

The play has to do with a charming Englishwoman who always gets what she wants, who overcomes all masculine opposition through feminine wiles. In this instance, she wants to make a dangerous trip through Morocco and does, of course. During the safari, she tames brigands and fierce Arabs, converts two hard-boiled relations to a more civilized and less ruthless way of life.

She is a great deal like the heroine of Shaw's "Man and Superman." Only, after winning her hapless male in this instance, she decides against marriage. For she realizes that it will hamper her proclivities for managing those about her. And there are moments when one can almost hear the music from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance," so similar are both works in plot and viewpoint.

Morton DaCosta has staged "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" with broadly effective strokes. The City Center is not notable for its acoustics, so the cast always speaks out to reach every corner of the big house.

Edna Best is beguiling as Lady Cicely, who achieves her ends through velvet-gloved tact and common sense. She plays the role with fine style. John Archer is excellent as the headstrong, violent, vengeful brigand, Brassbound. Clay Clement is first-rate as his shrewd and pompous adversary, Sir Howard Hallam.

Salutes also are due Loring Smith, Ian Martin, Noel Leslie and Bruce Gordon in other parts.

Ben Edwards and Emeline Roche have provided attractive settings and costumes.

"Captain Brassbound's Conversion" has the virtue of getting better as it progresses. After a slow first act, it swings into full speed. Its high spirits, its Shavian paradoxes, its sparkle, delighted the first-nighters. It amply compensated us for skating to the theatre over treacherously icy pavements.

In the audience was Grace George, who, we understand, was the last actress to essay the role of Lady Cicely in New York. This great lady of our stage appeared to enjoy the revival as much as we did.

"CAPTAIN BRASSBOUND'S CONVERSION"

Play by George Bernard Shaw; staged by Morton DaCosta; produced by George Schaefer; settings by Ben Edwards; costumes by Emeline Roche; presented by Maurice Evans, artistic supervisor, and the New York City Theatre Company at New York City Center, December 27, 1950. The cast:

Rankin.....Noel Leslie
Drinkwater.....Ian Martin
Hassan.....Walt Witcover
1st Krooboy.....Alfred Ruscio
2nd Krooboy.....Paul Steiner
Sir Howard Hallam.....Clay Clement
Lady Cicely.....Edna Best
Muley.....Alan Cahn
Marzo.....Robert Carricart
Brassbound.....John Archer
Redbook.....Hugh Green
Johnson.....Chris Gampel
1st Brassbound Man.....Robert Van Hooton
2nd Brassbound Man..Jack Horn
3rd Brassbound Man.....Walt Witcover
Osman.....Wendell Whitten
Sidi El Assif.....Bruce Gordon
Cadi of Kintafi.....Douglas M. H. Chandler
Bluejacket.....Dean Whitmore
Capt. Hamlin Kearney...Loring Smith

Synopsis: Act I. Late afternoon. Leslie Rankin's garden on the heights overlooking the harbor of Mogador in Morocco. Act II. Midday. A room in a Moorish castle. Act III. Rankin's garden. The following afternoon.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

December 28, 1950

A Happy Evening With Lady Cicely

By Richard Watts Jr.

One of the most remarkable things about Shaw's "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," which opened the City Centers theatrical season last night, is that it hasn't been played in New York for so many years. For it is a particularly delightful comedy that possesses, in addition to the customary Shavian virtues of wit, intelligence and verbal grace, a good melodramatic plot and a colorful, exotic background. It is the great man in a playful mood, wherein he is chiefly interested in sheer entertainment and the creation of a deft and charming characterization for a deft and charming actress. It is wonderful fun.

Of course, it has a lot of things to say, but they seem incidental to this creation of an especially winning part in an exceptionally winning comedy. As everyone knows, Shaw wrote it for his particular heroine, Ellen Terry, and he certainly put into it all of his regard and affection for her. If it has one central message, it is that a woman of grace and charm, with a genuine liking for people and a thoroughgoing conviction that they are all pretty good sorts, can go everywhere, even into darkest Morocco, and triumph over every difficulty by humor and honesty. He makes you believe it in this particular case.

Lady Cicely

I suspect it wouldn't be such a good idea for women in general to take the playwright at his word, but in the case of his Lady Cicely Waynflete he makes it the most natural thing imaginable that she should wander about North Africa, fall into the hands of a fantical Moorish chieftain, a dashing English brigand and an American naval officer and come out unscathed, after settling a family feud and enabling a band of modern buccaneers to escape the consequence of its misdeeds. Stage heroines who try to be miracles of charm and fail are a menace to the drama, but Lady Cicely is believably unconquerable.

Playgoers should possibly be warned that "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" takes a little while to get started and has a fairly placid first act, but by the time it has got going it has become a complete joy, an enchanting amalgamation of gaiety, wisdom and melodrama, and it remains that until the end. I suppose it is not really one of Shaw's major masterpieces, but there is such wonderful theatrical relish about it that it remains as fresh and alive as anything he ever wrote. It reminds one a little of "Candida" and a little of "The Devil's Disciple," but it has a quality all its own.

Edna Best

There were reports earlier in the season that Katherine Cornell and Cedric Hardwicke were going to play it, and I suspect that it is one of the mistakes of their lives that they decided not to. But it would be the height of ingratitude to complain, since the result is that Lady Cicely is portrayed by Edna Best, and she does it to something very close to perfection. The only other time I saw the play was in Dublin in 1943, where the role was played by the distinguished Dame Sybil Thorndike, and, if you are interested in comparisons, I can tell you that Miss Best manages it more attractively.

In fact, the entire City Center production, under Morton DaCosta's admirable direction, is excellent. John Archer is a properly stalwart Captain Brassbound, although he might be slightly more colorful about it. Clay Clement is excellent as the severe judge, who is the captain's uncle and enemy, and there is an especially humorous characterization by the expert Loring Smith as the dazzled American naval officer. Ian Martin is of great help as the scapegrace Drinkwater, and the others assist commendably. Among other things, "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is certainly the season's funniest comedy.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 28, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Happy Adventure

THE New York City Center has opened its winter season with a spacious and good-natured revival of George Bernard Shaw's "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." The work is far from the sturdiest of the late dramatist's prolific writings, but it is something of a novelty and generates considerable amusement at popular prices. Most of this stems from Edna Best's artful impersonation of Lady Cicely, who charmed and confounded brigands. Moorish chieftains, an American naval captain and her own stuffy brother-in-law at the turn of the century. John Archer and others lend color to the proceedings, but it is she who captures what wit and consequence there is in the production.

* * *

Although it was written in 1899, ostensibly for Ellen Terry, Shaw's "adventure," as he called it, has not been done here since 1916. It is easy to see why it has been comparatively neglected. A tedious exposition overlooking the harbor of Mogador, Morocco, is followed by a wild and woolly piece of broad clowning in a Moorish castle, making one wait until the final stanza for a swift interplay of Shavian witticisms. The Moorish fol-de-rol, frankly stolen from a travel yarn by Cunningham Graham, fills the ample City Center stage, but it needed songs and music to make it mildly amusing. As it stands, Miss Best moves valiantly through the nonsense, creating a character which sparkles brightly in the climax.

* * *

Undaunted by the vast auditorium, she makes Lady Cicely constantly amusing as she trips through African perils with high disrespect for male arrogance and complete assurance that an outstretched hand is the only passport she needs. The temptation to have over-done the part must have been great, but she has resolutely resisted it. Her conversion of a pirate, intent upon avenging his mother's death by killing her judicial relative, is a brilliantly modulated performance. Archer, as the justice's hard-bitten nephew, swaggers and succumbs to feminine irrationality at proper intervals, but he is trying where his co-star is succeeding.

* * *

Most of the supporting players have been well chosen for their various small assignments. Clay Clement is indignantly righteous as Sir Howard Hallam, who defies his vengeful nephew as he is about to be handed over to Atlas mountain justice; Ian Martin capers nimbly as one of Brassbound's crew, and Bruce Gordon has an effective moment as a sheik. A big cast is augmented by a crowd of extras and Morton DaCosta has kept them moving properly across the City Center stage in his direction. "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is a Shavian curiosity, rather well adapted to the theater's size and particular audiences. As a piece of stagecraft, it is chiefly distinguished for Miss Best's triumphant portrayal.

The New York Times

December 28, 1950

City Center Opens Its Winter Theatre Series With One of Shaw's Early Plays

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although Bernard Shaw has now left us for a more agreeable neighborhood, his spirit is still mischievous and witty. The spirit is currently visible in "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," which opened the City Center's winter series auspiciously last evening. This is the amusing comedy that Shaw wrote for Ellen Terry out of affection, admiration and wonder in 1899.

According to the Shavian legend, she did not recognize herself in Lady Cicely when she first read the manuscript. If this is so, she must have been a modest lady, for Lady Cicely is a charming, good-hearted, altogether captivating representative of British imperialism at the turn of the century.

* * *

Not that Shaw could carry the torch romantically. For he was a sardonic admirer. And it is his contention that a fine, high-minded, sentimental, motherly lady who refuses to recognize evil is unconquerable, gets everything she wants with no effort at all and completely upsets the dignified and responsible world of men.

Lady Cicely insists on taking a dangerous journey into Moslem territory. She cheerfully puts herself in the hands of a number of scoundrels, and finds herself in a highly-perilous situation. The men wrangle and point guns at each other. But the point of "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is that Lady Cicely, talking baby-talk and behaving innocently, sets everything to rights with no trouble at all, destroys the law, outmaneuvers the United States Navy and makes everyone love her and each other and surrender to blissful comity.

Since Shaw had to learn his craft like any other artisan, "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" begins with some of the most tedious and complicated exposition encountered in any comedy since "The Devil's Disciple." But stay with it, and it gathers lightness, satire and drollery; and, again, like "The Devil's Disciple," it turns up with a hilarious last act.

Under Morton Da Costa's direction, the City Center company performs it admirably. Edna Best, looking like one of Renoir's most adorable portraits, gives a warm, subtle and infinitely accomplished performance as Lady Cicely. Half artful, half sincere, she moves through the part with the greatest composure and good humor, making Shaw's ironic points as if they were her own. At the moment it is impossible to think of a part Miss Best has played more skillfully.

There is nothing shoddy about the casting or the performance. John Archer is an imposing though unwillingly susceptible Captain Brassbound. Clay Clement as a pompous British judge; Loring Smith as a chuckle-headed though gallant Naval captain; Noel Leslie as a wary Scottish medical missionary; Ian Martin as a loquacious, lying brigand with a treacherous personality; Bruce Gordon as a romantic sheik; Robert Carricart as an affable cut-throat—give excellent performances in a buoyant comic vein.

In designing the two sets, Ben Edwards has done an especially felicitous job with a Morocco garden overlooking a harbor; and Emmeline Roche has found suitable costumes for brigands, Moslem tribesmen and U. S. Navy officers in the whites of the Spanish War period.

If you insist on being exact about it, "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is minor Shaw. But it is gay, sly and intelligent; it is dry in style, and, since Shaw had Ellen Terry in mind when he wrote it, there is a pleasant streak of devotion running through the satire. All things considered, the City Center has begun the winter theatre series in a cheerful spirit.

DAILY NEWS

December 28, 1950

Edna Best Puts Some Sparkle Into 'Capt. Brassbound's Conversion'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is sound policy for any well-meaning theatre group to put on a Shaw comedy, so last evening the New York City Theatre Company launched its new season by offering G. B. S.'s "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." In this play, luckily, is Edna Best, giving a stylish and witty performance of a British lady who, by seeming simple and flighty, can bend to her purposes such assorted characters as a pirate, a missionary, a judge, a sheik and a captain of the U. S. Navy.

Shaw himself is always the villain in Shaw plays, and in the case of this 50-year-old comedy he is Lady Cicely, who has been captured by the renegade Captain Brassbound. Shaw, as Lady Cicely, deals roundly, as usual, with Christian morals, British justice and American gallantry, and manages to make them all look equally silly. As a matter of fact, even the play itself does not strike me as being bright as it might, for in it there is more talk than conflict. Lady Cicely has things so much her own way that her several victories are just so many setups. None of her opponents has much courage for fighting back, with the result that "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is, even for Shaw, remarkably uneventful.

A Fine Comedienne.

However, Miss Best is delightful. She is so much at ease on the stage, so much the mistress of all situations and so gifted with silken humor that she relieves the occasional stretches of tedium and makes bearable a comic-opera plot of Gilbert and Sullivan proportions. Which is a lucky thing for the City Center.

Miss Best has a goodly band of followers, with John Archer as Capt. Brassbound, Loring Smith as the U. S. Navy man, Noel Leslie as a Scottish missionary in Morocco, Ian Martin as a comedy ruffian and Clay Clement as the stuffy representative of British justice. Morton DaCosta has directed the production, and it may be to his credit that he has kept the comedy fairly alive as a theatre piece. There are two simple, serviceable and visually attractive sets by Ben Edwards.

The loyal City Center following will be happy to know that the Center is back in show business again.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 28, 1950

Shavian Play Proves It's a Woman's World

By WILLIAM HAWKINS

Type—Comedy
Topic—Woman's wit and will
Treatment—Comic and wise
Star—In exquisite taste
I find it—A mellow delight

There are few things I would trade for the pleasure of watching Edna Best in the unfamiliar Shavian comedy, "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." The play opens another season at the City Center, and for me, at least, is unexpectedly delightful.

It is peculiar that the play has been so neglected, because any actress should want to do it. I am glad not many of them have had the chance. The lone lady stars in a cast of three dozen men, and scores every point off all of them.

How dreadful it is to think of this role in the hands of an actress who was self-conscious, or convinced that she was funny. Miss Best plays her with gentle invincibility. Her Lady Cicely remains absolutely charming, because her sense of humor is never flaunted. She knows how to make a fool of a man for his own good. She does so with the grace of a swallow, and the determination of a bulldozer. Her genius lies in making the man love it.

A constant traveler, she here gets involved with a young Englishman turned pirate in Morocco. This brigand of the title, would wreak a horrible revenge on her brother-in-law, who once had usurped his property and injured his mother.

Lady Cicely first saves her brother-in-law from both the pirate and the wild Arabs, and then saves the pirate himself from the American Navy. By coming within a hair's breadth of losing her heart to him, she teaches him the secret of her infallible authority.

Since the play has a highly elaborate plot, the first act is largely spent in preparing the ground for what is to come. With Shaw's usual grace, a remarkable amount of information is revealed in what seems most normal, if chatty, conversation.

Where his great ability glows, though, is in presenting the characters through their attitudes. When a Shaw character makes a statement about an English institution, he reveals his own potentialities and his background for a couple of generations.

The current production is ingeniously mounted in a vivid African setting, and it is staged with liveliness as well as the fullest respect for the spoken word in a hall where audibility is not always easy to achieve. The styles of acting may not invariably jibe, but they are never in irritating conflict.

John Archer is the surly Captain who gets converted by the proficient Lady Cicely, and Clay Clement is her baffled brother-in-law. Standing out among the dozens of other gentlemen involved, by making the most of their opportunities, are Ian Martin as a rebellious assistant pirate, and Loring Smith as the American Naval Captain.

Journal-American

December 28, 1950

Hilarious, Well-Acted And Ably Directed

By JOHN McCLAIN

We are all apt to forget too easily that George Bernard Shaw, recently deceased, was a true genius. "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," which opened last night at the New York City Center Theatre, not one of his most auspicious plays by any standards, proves that we must never sell him short.

It is complex and the plot is irritating, but the old guy could really write a great line. Especially when you have somebody with the talents of Edna Best to deliver them.

The ceremonies involve Lady Cicely (Miss Best) and Sir Howard Hallam (Clay Clement) who arrive politely in Morocco aboard a yacht and become almost immediately caught in the clutches of a brigand named Capt. Brassbound (John Archer).

* * *

Doesn't Get Girl

I do not, fortunately, have enough space to tell you all about how Brassbound hijacks the party and seeks to wreak his revenge upon Sir Howard who, by a strange coincidence, turns out to be his uncle and the administrator of an estate in which he didn't benefit.

It is enough to say that the American Navy arrives in the third act and, brushing aside a large force of Moroccans, takes the situation in hand. Boy does not wind up getting girl, which is a tribute to the ingenuity of the Irish bard.

Many of the lines are hilarious and could have been written yesterday by, uh, well, by Garson Kanin. Miss Best, as I say, gives the Lady Cicely part the benefit of her superior experience and timing and easily runs away with the proceedings.

Next in order of contribution I would place Clay Clement, as Sir Howard Hallam, Noel Leslie as Rankin and Ian Martin as Drinkwater. Loring Smith supplied a highly amusing last-act performance as Capt. Hamlin Kearney, of the U. S. Navy.

* * *

Valiantly and earnestly as he strove in the part of Capt. Brassbound, I never quite believed John Archer. He has a mid-West accent strangely at odds with his alleged antecedents and a form of motion and deportment more readily associated with a good T-formation halfback.

Mr. Shaw's play, I thought, took an awful long time catching fire, and once it got going, much longer to put it out. The second act and much of the third are superb, but somebody should have yelled "Cut!" at least five minutes before the final curtain.

But that does not importantly detract from the fact that there is great humor in this play, that it is magnificently mounted and directed. And that you will have, by and large, a very good time indeed.

"King Lear"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 26, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

"General Woe"

A FLORIDLY theatrical production of "King Lear" is starring Louis Calhern at the National. John Houseman has staged Shakespeare's most macabre and muddled melodrama with an attempt at fluency and the high-lighting of lesser characters. Against Ralph Alswang's massive backdrops the action fluctuates violently and sometimes impressively as an old fool is done in by two demoniacal daughters and a bastard. Unfortunately what approaches a motion picture technique detracts constantly from the eloquence which makes the drama unbearable, while Calhern's efforts to share scenes with his colleagues merely adds to the general confusion.

* * *

Better actors than the star have been bested in trying to give sequence and meaning to the dire events which prompt the Duke of Albany to utter the celebrated tag line: "our present business is general woe." Few have worked more earnestly or extravagantly to trace the downfall and final madness of a once proud king. Calhern brings moments of deep passion, perception and pity to the part, but there is an air of bombast to even the more placid scenes of the thriller in his characterization. Since Norman Lloyd, as the jester; Wesley Addy, as the wronged Edgar, and Jo Van Fleet, in the role of Regan, match his all-out acting on more than one occasion, the revival strikes a strident pitch and holds it.

* * *

Houseman has cut the classic into three oddly assorted acts in his direction, achieving his greatest success in the first continuity of scenes, which demonstrates clearly that Lear undid himself by regal vanity. During this interlude, even the wild plot assumes some pattern, as the bastard Edmund joins his private machinations with those of the evil Regan and Goneril. Once the floodgates of murder, torture, madness and infidelity are unloosed, his scheme of presentation makes less sense than a conventional production. There are constant groupings of marching figures on the stage and a rather striking impressionistic re-creation of the heath scene, but one has to watch sharply to see just who is being blinded, betrayed or stabbed at any particular moment.

* * *

For all of Calhern's gracious desire to make Lear merely the chief member of the general carnage, he takes over most of the sequences in the revival in no uncertain manner. At one point he reclines on the very lip of the stage to deliver a line and he emerges from some curious depth with wild gesticulations. Edith Atwater confines herself to glaring with arms akimbo as the monstrous Goneril and Joseph Wiseman plays Edmund with a combination of nimble stepping and hand-flinging. Martin Gabel is a staunch and believable faithful Kent; Arnold Moss plays Gloucester quietly and Nina Foch looks very pretty as Lear's nice daughter, Cordelia. Others include Nehemiah Persoff, Richard Malek and Martin Waldron. They are all engaged in an interesting, but tortured revival.

"KING LEAR"

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by John Houseman; incidental music and songs by Marc Blitzstein; scenery and lighting by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Dorothy Jeakins; presented by Robert L. Joseph and Alexander H. Cohen at the National Theatre, December 25, 1950. The cast:

Earl of Kent.....Martin Gabel
Earl of Gloucester..Arnold Moss
Edmund.....Joseph Weiseman
King Lear.....Louis Calhern
Duke of Cornwall.....
Nehemiah Persoff
Duke of Albany..Richard Malek
Goneril.....Edith Atwater
Regan.....Jo Van Fleet
Cordelia.....Nina Foch
Duke of Burgundy.....
Martin Waldron
King of France.....
Frederic Warriner
Edgar.....Wesley Addy
Lear's Fool.....Norman Lloyd
Curan.....Mitchell Agruss
Oswald.....Kurt Richards
Loyal Knight.....Guy Arbury
Gentleman of the Court..
E. J. Ballantine

DAILY NEWS

December 26, 1950

Louis Calhern Triumphs in Fine, Majestic Revival of 'King Lear'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The production of "King Lear" which opened Monday evening at the National brings nobility and excitement to the stage. The nobility is mostly Shakespeare's, for this is the vastest and most majestic of his dramas; but this nobility also belongs in no small part to Louis Calhern, whose performance is a majestic step forward in the career of a man of the theatre—and it belongs further to a fine company of players and their director, John Houseman.

"Lear" is not often done on the stage. Fewer than a dozen productions have been made of it here in this century, the last of which was offered by Donald Wolfit's hapless English stock company in 1947. The scholars are always saying that this is a drama for the library—that its scope and passion and heartbreak can best be felt through reading—and this is naturally a challenge for people who believe that the proper place for a drama is upon the stage.

An Actor Keeps Growing

On the stage of the National Theatre some excellent people are accepting this challenge and are giving "King Lear" a compelling performance. The drama is a vibrant, living thing, for it has been taken off the bookshelf and put where it belongs.

Mr. Calhern carries it in a very great sense, for the role of Lear is a grand and burdensome one and he never wearies of it. Here is an actor from folksy comedy like "Life With Father," parlor comedy like "The Play's the Thing," character playing like "The Magnificent Yankee" and a number of more or less forgettable movies who is audacious enough to essay Lear. And, once he has dared himself to do it, he goes through with it in a manner to show his growing inner resources as an actor. His voice is splendid and his speech is clear—but, better than these assets, his intelligence is keen. Last evening I felt that he was always right in his judgment of the role—in the sure rhythm of his performance as he ranged through all the emotions of the most kingly and most tragic of all kings of less than heavenly birth.

But "King Lear" cannot be a solo performance, for there is so very, very much in it. This new production is admirable in its clarity, in its scenic scheme, in its costuming, in its musical background, in its direction and in the playing of all those people who are desperate enemies or desperate friends of a vastly troubled man.

Cast and Setting Splendid.

The setting is by Ralph Alswang, and it is a good one because it keeps the full stage in use throughout the many changes of scene; a full stage can barely contain the scope of the drama. The costumes, by Dorothy Jeakins, seem to have the rhythm and pace of the play itself, until in the final moments Lear appears in a robe of dazzling white. Mr. Blitzstein's trumpet, drum, flute and horn background is always dramatically useful, but I'd like to suggest that the roll of the kettledrum be diminished during the long storm scene in the second act because it occasionally dominates the speech.

Arnold Moss is a fine and heroic Earl of Gloucester and Wesley Addy is admirable as his legitimate son. Joseph Wiseman shows intelligently controlled menace in the part of the plotting bastard, Edmund, and one of the best of the supporting performances is given by Norman Lloyd as the king's fool. Lear's three daughters, as played by Edith Atwater, Jo Van Fleet and Nina Foch, are very well chosen for type and ability, and Martin Gabel has some effective scenes as the Earl of Kent. And over the whole production may be felt the sensitive and sure hand of Mr. Houseman, the director.

The New York Times

December 26, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Not in our time has "King Lear" had so worthy a hearing in New York. It opened at the National last evening with Louis Calhern as the monarch of anguish and woe. This is Shakespeare's most savage tragedy and the most difficult to stage. It is more poem than drama, and it stretches the theatre to the breaking point.

Some of it, to tell the truth, lies beyond the strength of Mr. Calhern and his associates. Possibly no one can play the storm scene so that it looks and sounds like an intelligible piece of theatre. Mr. Calhern plays it at the top of his lungs against a roar of sound from Marc Blitzstein's musicians. Losing the music and majesty of the poetry, which are the genius of the episode, Mr. Calhern and John Houseman, the director, have lost the theatrical values of this wild moment in Shakespeare's terrible symphony.

* * *

With that critical comment out of the way, the rest of this notice will be an appreciation of what Mr. Calhern and Mr. Houseman have accomplished. Wasting no time on pageantry or ceremony, they have gone straight to the heart of a pitiless story and conveyed it briskly and bluntly on the stage. Ralph Alswang has set it sufficiently with a practicable platform and portentous hangings that catch the mood, and Dorothy Jeakins has designed simple, terse costumes. Visually the accent of the production is on strength and violent feeling.

Not so many years ago, Mr. Calhern was an amusing matinee leading man. Nothing in the theatre has been more interesting than the deliberation with which he has become an actor. He is no elocutionist, and that is an asset in the present instance. For he has created an intelligible old man out of Shakespeare's poetic motives—a foolish, egotistical, testy old man, but one who is human and whose suffering is real and affecting.

* * *

If it were done on a grander scale, it might be closer to the spirit of Shakespeare's fiery poetry. But then it might lose contact with humanity. And the great thing about Mr. Calhern's Lear is the sympathy it evokes—the tenderness of the scenes with the broken-hearted Fool, the poignance of the reunion with Cordelia in the last act and the overflowing grief of the concluding scene when Lear mourns over Cordelia's body. Mr. Calhern has succeeded wonderfully in arousing the interest of the audience in the painful tribulations of a vain and broken old man.

There is not a poorly acted part in the entire performance, and the parts have been dramatically related in the direction. The hardness of Edith Atwater's cruel Goneril contrasts with the sweet dignity of Nina Foch's Cordelia; the open-faced loyalty of Martin Gabel's Kent and the guilelessness of Wesley Addy's Edgar contrast with the unctuous treachery of Joseph Wiseman's Edmund.

Arnold Moss gives strength and clarity to the performance with his admirable portrait of Gloucester. Norman Lloyd has got under the surface of the character of the Fool with his lyric and affectionate acting. As Regan, Jo Van Fleet may be acting a little beyond her strength but she gives the part a good deal of vitality in the performance as a whole.

Mr. Blitzstein's score is one of his best pieces of work, although it could still be subordinated to the speaking now and then. But these are only minor reflections on a remarkably creditable and creative performance. Everyone knows that Charles Lamb thought "King Lear" could not be acted. Until last evening, this department always agreed with him. But Mr. Calhern and Mr. Houseman have changed all that. "King Lear" can be acted—at least, most of it; and played in candid, human terms, it is a powerful, harrowing, vivid drama.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 26, 1950

Stage Can't Hold 'Lear' Weight

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Shakespearean tragedy
Topic—Thankless children
Star—Theatrical
Performance—Eager
I find—No lightning.

Some authorities assert that Shakespeare's "King Lear" has never been given an entirely satisfactory production. The new local one adds weight to that argument.

The play is so demanding of large scale human emotions and enormous elements that I suspect it could only come off with all its required thunderousness as a moving picture, where everything could be much larger than life.

An elderly British monarch retires, leaving his kingdom to the two of his daughters who profess extravagant love for him. The third, disinherited, comes back into his life only in time to offer him brief respite from the evils of the other two, who have driven him mad.

Quick Betrayal.

The chief difficulty with the play is that so little chance is given Lear to establish character, or the daughters to depict any normal relationship with him, before the whole picture begins to disintegrate. They are betraying him, and he is going to pieces, almost immediately after the play begins.

The play tells how avarice leads these people into a web of deceit, lust, hatred and violence. It ought to go bowling along with the momentum of increasingly terrible passions. For me, this production never goes freewheeling. Its emotional brakes are stuck.

Louis Calhern, the star, in the title role, presents most interesting aspects of the pathetic monarch's madness and is touching at the death of his beloved daughter. The performance lacks the entire stature of a king, and so the tragedy never seems as big as it should.

From the Heart.

Arnold Moss is most successful in the vital role of Gloucester. He reads the lines with a sense of poetry and understanding. His tone springs from the heart, which is more than can be said for most of the cast.

Norman Lloyd has some gently touching moments as Lear's fool, and Wesley Addy is the Edgar who is forced to feign madness to save himself.

As the three daughters, Nina Foch is gentle and lovely as Cordelia whose devotion is genuine, Edith Atwater is handsome and coolly devious as Goneril, and Jo Van Fleet is a passionate Regan.

Center Staged.

The production is physically gloomy, as it should be. The shifting panels and lights give the effect of dull gem-colored stalactites. It seemed to me that far too much of the action clung to the center of the stage, and that there was too much walking to and from that position.

The performance as a whole reminded me of a nice, low fire waiting for somebody to throw gunpowder on it.

Journal-American

December 26, 1950

A Magnificent Cast And a Fine Production

By JOHN McCLAIN

You like Shakespeare?

Maybe that is an unfair question, because there is an awful lot of Shakespeare, and you could be pardoned for liking some and not all.

Frankly, that's the way I feel. I have never liked "King Lear," the excessively wordy and expansive bijou which opened at the National Theatre last night with Louis Calhern in the lead role. But if you like "King Lear" you should like this one, for it is done with extreme taste, thoughtful and ingenious production and a magnificent cast.

Mr. Calhern munches on most of the scenery and, at one juncture, nearly gnaws the occupants of the first row center, but that is the requirement of the title part and he plays it to what we used to call the hilt.

If you will harken back to the days of your childhood when somebody made you read it, you will recall that the story concerns the mad convolutions of this King and the deceitful behavior of his three daughters and their separate swains. Things get so tough, as you'll remember, that the monarch flips his skimmer.

* * *

Direction Excellent

The current production, masterfully directed by John Houseman, employs a series of starkly simple sets—little more than skilfully lit back-drops—to portray the change in scene. An off-stage orchestra renders incidental music by Marc Blitzstein, which maintains the proper mood.

This is never a restrained or somnolent "Lear." Mr. Calhern gives full voice and action to his part, and his example is faithfully followed by, particularly, Jo Van Fleet, as his daughter, Regan, and Joseph Wiseman, as the bastard son of the Earl of Gloucester.

Less expansive but noteworthy, were the performances of Richard Malek, Nehemiah Persoff, Martin Waldron, Norman Lloyd, Frederic Warriner, Edith Atwater and Nina Foch.

Any such noisy and bombastic play lends itself to elaborate histrionics, and that's just what it gets. But if you like Shakespeare, and "King Lear" in particular, you'll have a memorable evening in the theatre.

Daily Mirror
December 26, 1950

National Theatre's 'Lear' Proves Disappointing

By ROBERT COLEMAN

There are those who argue that "King Lear" is William Shakespeare's greatest play, but after seeing the production of it which Robert L. Joseph and Alexander H. Cohen brought to the National Theatre last evening, we are a "Hamlet" or even a "Macbeth" man.

Some of the "Lear" aficionados go so far as to concede, however, that it demands great acting, that it is one of the least effective of the Bard's plays when not graced with superlative performances. Personally, we have never seen what came across the footlights as great acting in any of the several presentations we've caught.

We are beginning to suspect that "Lear" is a trap for the stars who venture to tackle the title role. We have watched a few in our time go down to defeat. The current King is Louis Calhern, who is something of a victim of the part, and, even more, of the ineffectual direction by John Houseman.

Calhern has a rich and powerful voice. He has physical stature. These were admirable assets in the early passages, when Lear was still the commanding, the imperious ruler. And he did about as well in the later sequences, when the King is broken and demented because of the ingratitude of his favored daughters, as any of the actors who have essayed the transformation in recent seasons.

The Calhern performance has evidently been carefully prepared. In fact, we had the feeling occasionally that it had been overly prepared; that it was too meticulous, that it depended upon detail rather than broadness of scope for its effect. For this, we are inclined to blame Houseman, because the entire production appeared to move too slowly. It failed to develop cumulative dramatic impact until quite late in the evening.

The supporting cast represents a mixture of styles which seldom became integrated into a moving and stirring whole. We liked particularly the Gloucester of Arnold Moss. It had dignity and eloquence. We were disappointed in the Goneril and Regan of Edith Atwater and Jo Van Fleet. Miss Van Fleet's impersonation of Regan came perilously close to being satiric in her more emotional scenes.

Martin Gabel's Kent was straightforward and helpful. Nina Foch was a graceful and tender Cordelia, though it was sometimes difficult to hear her over the salvos of coughs that marred our reception of the play. Wesley Addy was not at his best in the dual roles of Edgar and Tom. Crazy Tom, however, is a very trying character, both for the actor and the spectator.

Norman Lloyd and Joseph Wiseman weren't able to do much with Lear's Fool and Edmund.

The settings by Ralph Alswang have the virtue of fluidity, obviating lulls for changes of background. Alswang has used steps, a moving platform and jagged, modernistic scenic strips which resemble fingers of a huge hand. They proved distracting in some of the episodes. Marc Blitzstein has provided an incidental musical score that rumbles along disturbingly.

"King Lear," in sum, was a disappointment for us.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
December 26, 1950

The Mighty Problem of 'King Lear'

By Richard Watts Jr.

The grave problem of whether Shakespeare's "King Lear," one of the mightiest of dramatic conceptions, can be fitted within the crippling confines of the theatre remains, so far as I am concerned, unanswered after the handsome and intelligent presentation of this immensely difficult play at the National last night. There can be no question about the visual effectiveness of the new production, the physical impressiveness of Louis Calhern in the title role, the excellence of several of the other performances, and the admirable vigor of the staging. But the overwhelming power the tragedy possesses in the library was muted on the stage.

Can it be that such assorted Shakespearean pundits as Charles Lamb and Margaret Webster are right in their conviction that "King Lear," while one of the greatest of dramatic poems, is not a really actable play? I still believe that, even when so much of its titanic emotional force seems oddly missing, the famous tragedy is a fascinating theatrical work. There is no doubt, though, that it presents enormous problems in the staging and playing, and that there are times when its practical theatrical difficulties make scenes which should virtually knock an audience out of its seats, verge upon the embarrassing.

Mr. Calhern

One of its basic difficulties, of course, is that "King Lear" is a poetic tragedy without a really tragic figure. The unhappy old king is at best merely a pathetic figure, a foolish dotard without any indication that he had ever possessed any signs of grandeur. Mr. Calhern, as I have said, is a highly imposing Lear, who reads his speeches with vigor and understanding, and he has moments in which he is genuinely touching. I have the deepest respect for his performance, but it was my unhappy impression last night that, on the whole, he was not nearly as moving as he should have been. He was interesting, rather than stirring.

It was, I think, only in part his responsibility. For it is a curious feature of the play that Lear, who is nominally its central character, is not really its central interest. The basic concern of the tragedy, unless I am even more mistaken than usual, is not so much the sad plight of the foolish and unfortunate Lear as the dramatization of sheer, elemental evil in an elemental world. Good has few triumphs in this bitterly pessimistic work, its only victory being that, even in defeat, integrity and loyalty are somehow maintained. But it is monstrous wickedness that gives "King Lear" its epic power.

Kent and the Fool

One of the exasperating things about this superb but ungainly tragedy is the way it wastes some of its most interesting characters. The faithful Kent, that blunt and devoted follower of a king who does not appreciate him, is one of the most attractive figures in all of Shakespeare, and he is excellently played in the current production by Martin Gabel. But, about halfway through the evening, he is relegated to the background. As for the king's loyal, melancholy Fool, touchingly conceived by the dramatist and excellently acted by Norman Lloyd, he serves his purpose in the great scene on the heath, and quietly lies down and dies.

That famous episode on the heath in the storm, with the mad king, the professional fool and the fugitive Edgar, who is pretending madness, is one of the greatest of the play's conceptions, but I thought it was only moderately effective last night. But if "King Lear" failed to seem as tremendous as those of us who admire it are convinced that it is, the production, under John Houseman's sympathetic direction, was at least good enough to suggest that we are not wrong about its stage potentialities. And, in addition to the players I have cited, I admired Nina Foch as the exasperating Cordelia, Arnold Moss as the blinded Gloucester, and Edith Atwater as the fiendish Goneril. And I still stubbornly believe that Charles Lamb and Margaret Webster are wrong.

"Twentieth Century"

Journal American

December 26, 1950

Jose and Gloria Make It a Memorable Evening

By JOHN McCLAIN

The A.N.T.A. chose Christmas Eve, a time when every solid citizen should be at home toiling over a hot stocking, to open the latest in their series, "Twentieth Century," a revival of the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur comedy, presently starring Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson. Fortunately for those of us who were incommoded it is a rewarding effort.

The play has valiantly survived the ravages of years and Miss Swanson, enjoying an incredible renaissance in pictures, radio and TV, establishes the further fact that she can act.

Mr. Ferrer, who produced and directed, is superb in the other big part. By and large it is a lively and memorable evening in the theatre.

As the name suggests, the entire action takes place aboard the Twentieth Century Limited between Chicago and New York.

Mr. Ferrer plays the role of a flat-broke producer, returning from a flop in Chicago and desperately in need of a new bankroll. Miss Swanson, an ex-flame of his and a reigning cinema queen, is in the drawing room next to him and it is obvious from the outset that if he can get her name on a contract his future financial difficulties will be solved.

Involved in the hilarious peregrinations moving toward this end are his press agent, Robert Strauss; Donald Foster, his manager; Robert Carroll, the unexpected and current swain of Miss Swanson; Werner Klemperer, a wacky tycoon who plasters the premises with religious messages; two bearded fugitives from a German Passion Play; a masculine lady doctor and the usual assortment of porters, conductors and train personnel.

It is a tribute to the authors and the general consistency of producers and movie actresses that the proceedings remain remarkably fresh today. Certain efforts have been made to bring it up to date, references to "Mister Roberts" and Tennessee Williams, but the basic humor is valid.

If one were to write a comedy, which is unlikely, he would be fortunate indeed to have Jose Ferrer to give word and gesture to his script. This guy is great.

* * *

And Miss Swanson, about whose fabulous resurgence in "Sunset Boulevard" everybody has been slightly condescending, reveals herself as a skillful comedienne and an actress of poise and precision.

I will not attempt to estimate the lady's age, but the crux of the festivities hinge upon the fact that she is a relatively young and very attractive movie actress—and she makes it stick.

The setting is certainly adequate, but I was disconcerted by the fact that occasionally actors were left sitting alone in the dark while the main action went on a few feet away, in the lit-up part of the stage. They must get awfully bored, the ones in the dark with nothing to do.

"TWENTIETH CENTURY"

Comedy by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, based on a play by Bruce Milholland; staged by Jose Ferrer; settings and lighting by Wolfgang Roth; costumes by Noel Taylor; presented by the American National Theatre and Academy at the ANTA Playhouse, December 24, 1950. The cast:

Dr. Johnson.. Paula Bauersmith
Train Secretary.. Robinson Stone
Porter..... P. Jay Sidney
Grover Lockwood.. Ralph Bunker
Anita Highland... Betty Bartley
Owen O'Malley.. Robert Strauss
Conductor..... Burton Mallory
Oliver Webb..... Donald Foster
Flannagan.... John Glendinning
Pullman Conductor.....
Edward Platt
Matthew Clark.... William Lynn
1st Beard... Werner Klemperer
2nd Beard..... Leon Askin
Oscar Jaffe..... Jose Ferrer
Waiter..... Van Prince
Sadie..... Eva Leonard-Boyne
Lily Garland... Gloria Swanson
George Smith... Robert Carroll
1st Detective..... Paul Lilly
2nd Detective.. Charles Summers
Max Jacobs.... Henry Sherwood

DAILY NEWS

December 25, 1950

Gloria Swanson Scores a Success In Revival of 'Twentieth Century'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There still is a lot of madcap fun in the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur "Twentieth Century," which was revived yesterday by ANTA at its Playhouse—and in it Gloria Swanson is a capital funmaker. In the role of an excessively temperamental and self-appreciating actress, Miss Swanson has a gaudy holiday, wearing several sets of fetching raiment, making love with abandon and timing her laughs with professional insight.

One for the Money.

I don't see what a revival of "Twentieth Century" has to do with the devoted purpose of the American National Theatre and Academy—which is to sponsor and encourage new talent—unless it is to make some money. And maybe the comedy will make some money once it gets rolling. With yesterday's first two performances out of the way, the players should be able to make it rougher and faster, which it should be.

It is a farce, and it should travel just as fast as its setting is supposed to be traveling—the setting being the Twentieth Century Limited eastbound from Chicago with its passengers including, in addition to Miss Swanson, Jose Ferrer, a grandiose and sharpshooting theatrical producer bent on signing the actress to a contract; Billy Lynn, a mild religious maniac, and Robert Strauss, a theatrical press agent whose vocabulary and cynicism are those of a real-life press agent, Richard Maney.

Confusion Is Rife.

Confusion abounds aboard the train, what with Mr. Lynn pasting religious handbills on car windows and passengers' hats; with two German Passion Play characters looking for a backer; with a female doctor trying to sell Mr. Ferrer a drama she has written; with Robert Carroll, an actors' agent, frequently flinging himself at Miss Swanson's feet in impassioned pleas of affection, and with Ralph Bunker and Betty Bartley, as a business man and his secretary, "hacking away at the Mann Act."

Mr. Ferrer plays his role with elegance and humor, but I'd like to suggest that he be a bit more crude in his approach to the role. Hecht and MacArthur were not achieving a work of art in "Twentieth Century"; they were doing a slapdash cartoon and the cartoon needs slapdash execution. Since Mr. Ferrer is the director of the production, he should be able to manage this easily enough.

Mr. Lynn is excellent as the little man who pastes up handbills and gives Mr. Ferrer a worthless check for $200,000 with which to produce a Passion Play, being modest, innocent-looking but sly. Some of the dialogue has been modernized with such improvements as a reference to "Mister Roberts"—and so has the Twentieth Century Limited. Wolfgang Roth has designed a pair of drawing rooms and a lounge which are very comfortable for traveling.

After its run at the ANTA Playhouse, "Twentieth Century" is scheduled to go to Broadway for a commercial engagement. It should do fairly well.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
December 26, 1950

Ferrer and Miss Swanson Fine in Revived Comedy

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The American National Theatre and Academy, which didn't have much luck with its two recent efforts to present the more serious aspects of the drama, turned frankly commercial at the ANTA Playhouse Sunday night and, with the irony characteristic of the stage, had its first genuine success. The offering was "Twentieth Century," a celebrated Hecht and MacArthur charade of the early thirties, with Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson now in the leading roles, and the pleasant news is that it is still a bright and hilarious lampoon about the strange antics of the peculiar flora and fauna that produce and act in Broadway plays.

Although there has been a mild intermittent attempt to make the comedy topical by introducing references to "Mister Roberts" and Tennessee Williams, it is clear that "Twentieth Century" deals with the theatre of an earlier day. It is a matter of fact, and not of an ancient's nostalgia, that the stage of the play's period, whatever its faults and idiocies, had a wild and racy quality, particularly in the crazy richness of its personalities, that is naturally lacking in this serious epoch, and it is one of the joys of the Hecht-MacArthur work that it captures so much of that pleasant madness with such entertaining relish.

As a play, it isn't anything momentous, but it contains no end of hearty fun and its central characters, the egocentric producer who is always acting and the actress who gives her best playing in her tantrums, are a pleasure to observe, if you appreciate eccentricity in human character. It is a bravura piece, and it demands bravura acting. The present production is by no means as expert as it might have been, but it has the immense virtue of having just the right sort of actors in its two leading roles. For example, the oncoming Jose Ferrer is exactly as he should be as the individual who is a composite of various producing geniuses of their day.

Miss Swanson

Since he is one of the best actors in the American theatre, Mr. Ferrer's success in the role is not a surprise, but it is possible that one or two people in the audience may have been astonished by the triumph of Gloria Swanson. At this point in her career, nothing that Miss Swanson achieves should astonish anybody, but, after all, she has had little stage experience, and the Lily Garland of "Twentieth Century" is an exacting role. To do no beating about bushes, she is downright wonderful. That indefinable thing called "glamour," so often talked about and so rarely to be encountered, is Gloria Swanson's in abundance, and, stage experience or not, she makes every one of her scenes crackle with excitement and humor.

The most important of the secondary parts is that of a swashbuckling press agent, given to calling people "foul Corsicans," and everyone in the theatre knows it was based on a scientific study of the life and works of a gentleman, still extant, named Richard Maney. I won't be satisfied until Mr. Maney, himself, plays the role, and Robert Strauss, who now has it, is not handsome or dashing enough to be entirely realistic, but it is a tremendously funny part. Lesser maniacs in the proceedings are well played by Donald Foster, William Lynn and Robert Carroll, and the others suffice. "Twentieth Century" is a proper tribute to the days when being in the theatre was fun.

New York World-Telegram
and
The ~~World~~ Sun

December 26, 1950

'20th Century' Puts New Jewel In Gloria Swanson's Crown

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Farce.
Topic—Actress' career.
Swanson—Conquers new world.
Play—Boisterous, with creaks.
Laughs—Whopping.
I Find It—Gloria's event.

It long since ceased to be startling that Gloria Swanson was amazing. It is only startling that she can go on being more amazing.

In "Twentieth Century," second production of the ANTA subscription season, she completely subdues the legitimate theater, an institution of entertainment with which she has not in the past been on the best of terms.

The role of the temperamental star in this comedy gives her a grand opportunity to make some hilarious comments on the prima donnas she understands so well. This is another projection of the same woman she portrayed so brilliantly on film in "Sunset Boulevard." Where that was macabre, even repellent when it was not morbidly fascinating, this performance is mercilessly comic.

It's All Big.

Everything about the Swanson portrayal is big—the gestures, the poses, the wild exaggeration. Even the eye-rolling with which she makes a simple line into a big laugh, carries to the back of the house. But none of it is out of proportion, and it is funny because it is the product of an intelligent, trained sense of theatrical humor.

The play has been rephrased to bring it up to date. At heart it is timeless, because its subject is spotlighted vanity, which is hardly seasonable. The story tells of the melodramatic efforts of a producing genius to bring a glamorous star back from pictures to the theater, under his management, at a time when his own reputation is fading.

What the play chiefly suffers from is its singleness of purpose. Three acts is a lot of time to devote to one pretty superficial situation, and its progress runs mighty thin. The humor is often cruel and profane, contemptuous rather than tolerant.

Swanson Again.

Everybody in it is a "character," and except for one warm scene of Miss Swanson's, the play grows downright boring when the cast stops shouting or running around at top speed.

The fact that it has a good many shock laughs is hardly reason enough to revive it. The fact that it establishes Miss Swanson, new glory, as a lusty comedienne and a peerless mistress of the art of reaction, is quite reason enough.

Jose Ferrer has directed it with turbulent animation and gives a slick portrayal of the self-conscious producer. William Lynn is daft and charming as a would-be angel, and Robert Carroll is a handsome straight man for the star's carryings on. Bright comic touches are added by Paula Bauersmith, Ralph Bunker, Betty Bartley, Robert Strauss and Eva Leonard-Boyne.

The New York Times

December 25, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In eighteen long years nothing has happened to the Hecht and MacArthur "Twentieth Century" except that José Ferrer and Gloria Swanson are now in it. That would be a fine thing to happen to any comedy. For they make a very funny pair of cartoonists—broad in style and fast in pace; and "Twentieth Century," which was hilarious when it was new, is still uproarious in the new version put on yesterday afternoon and evening at the ANTA Playhouse.

The current artisans have made a few changes in the text to coincide with the more sedate facts of 1950, and they have not yet worked up to what might be regarded as a sustained conclusion. Isn't the last scene too truncated for its own good?

* * *

But that is something that a few extra lines could easily set to rights; otherwise this picaresque yarn of a fabulous railroad journey from Chicago to New York is the perfect low-comedy satire on the gaudy follies of theatre people. It chronicles the shameless devices by which a bankrupt theatre producer swindles a Hollywood star into signing a contract to act under his house-flag.

Rowdy and pungent in literary style, it captures the arrogance, spuriousness and excitement of the theatre's business techniques, and tosses around some of the most devastating gags of the last gusty generation. Mr. Hecht and Mr. MacArthur were more outrageous than usual when they stuffed all this horseplay inside the sleek Pullmans of the Central's crack flier. But no one who knows the theatre would dare assume that they libeled either the egotism or ingenuity of the theatre's flamboyant people.

* * *

Since Mr. Ferrer is not only an accomplished actor but a shrewd and spirited director, the performance he has staged is tumultuous and racy. Wolfgang Roth, the scene designer, has made something gay out of the interior of a railroad car, and Noel Taylor has found ways of bringing some spectacularly vulgar costumes into it. All the actors seem to be entirely authentic after the manner of breathless lampoons of the theatre. But it would be unforgivable not to say a special word for Donald Foster's nervous general manager, William Lynn's amiable religious lunatic, Robert Carroll's humorlessly passionate lover and, particularly, Robert Strauss' rasping press agent, who would be Dick Maney to the life except that he takes a few nips of the bottle.

Miss Swanson gives a vastly enjoyable performance as the Hollywood hellcat, darting swiftly around the set, tossing off the vernacular with snarling vitality and giving the vanity all its deliberate humor without burlesquing it. She plays with the relish and flavor of a good trouper who is having an uncommonly fine time.

As the grandiloquently egocentric producer, Mr. Ferrer gives further evidence of his genius as an actor. For it is genius to be acting every scene with the hands, face, back, feet and voice as though they constituted one instrument. Mr. Ferrer is an actor in the grand manner who also has a sense of humor. You can find nearly everything we all love in the theatre in his forceful, fluid, swagger and impetuously funny performance. Conspiring with the roguish authors, Miss Swanson and he have given the theatre's funnybone a good, solid whack.

New York Herald Tribune

December 25, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Still Worth the Extra Fare

THE American National Theater and Academy has gone to the files for its third production and come up with a superbly acted and hilarious revival. With Gloria Swanson and Jose Ferrer in starring roles, "Twentieth Century" is an even more exhilarating travesty than one remembers it to have been eighteen years ago. The Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur situations interlock deftly in a tremendously amusing lampoon of the theater and its people. The lines ripple with wit and wisecracks. Staged consummately by Ferrer at the ANTA Playhouse, the show puts most of its contemporaries to shame.

It is curious, but none the less gratifying, to find an organization dedicated to the development of new talent, rediscovering and refructifying a comparative relic. The Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur deserve the utmost credit, of course, for having composed a sturdy and enduring farce about stage nonsense, but it stands up triumphantly because of gifted ministrations. Miss Swanson, who has already won extraordinary acclaim for her performance in the screen's "Sunset Boulevard," covers herself with glory as the temperamental actress returning from Hollywood to Broadway. That she matches the more theatrically experienced Ferrer in every scene is a demonstration of soaring talent. The latter never misses a trick in the role of the vainglorious producer who turns the staid Twentieth Century into an antic bedlam.

Wolfgang Roth's interior of a Pullman car contains the action perfectly, but it is the fantastically plausible sequence of events which gives "Twentieth Century" a superb comic crescendo. From the moment that the impresario's emissaries toss an erring couple out of a stateroom to the fake death-bed climax in the club car, the offering moves with unerring pace, humor and exuberance. Ferrer's acting is splendidly extravagant, while his direction is as keen as a stiletto. All the characters come to vivid life. Their alarums and excursions, as a bankrupt producer signs up a former star with the aid of a couple of Nuremburg passion players and a religious nut, are a source of constant merriment.

A few topical lines have been inserted in the script, but it is the original sallies, particularly those of a raucous press agent, said to have been patterned vaguely on Richard Maney, which get and deserve most of the laughter at the ANTA. The two finest scenes remain that in which the showman acts out the Passion Play for a would-be Magdalene and the one in which he finds everything growing dark until the star has signed his contract. Miss Swanson and Ferrer are so good that it is hard to single out others in the company for special mention. William Lynn is fine as the screw-loose evangelist; Robert Strauss gives a good account of himself as the publicity man and Donald Foster is excellent as the theatrical titan's bedevilled business manager. "Twentieth Century" is a jubilant revival.

Daily Mirror

December 25, 1950

Swanson, Ferrer Liven 'Twentieth Century'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

As the third production of its subscription series, ANTA brought an amusing revival of "Twentieth Century" to the ANTA Playhouse yesterday afternoon. The Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur farce, based on a play by Bruce Milholland, wears its age remarkably well. Especially since a new ending has been provided.

The antic, as you may recall, has to do with theatrical temperament. Oscar Jaffe, a flamboyantly hammy producer, has lost his third shirt in a row on an arty flop in Chicago. When he hears that Lily Garland, his ex-star, is en route to New York, after making a successful film, he wangles the compartment next to hers on the Twentieth Century Limited.

The flighty Lily is accompanied, unfortunately for Jaffe, by her manager and new lover. But that doesn't faze the unscrupulous Oscar. He digs up a turkey script and a phony backer right on the train. And, even more important, he tricks the tempestuous Lily into signing a contract with him, right under the very nose of his shrewd rival, Max Jacobs.

Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson team as Oscar and Lily to give the play the lift it needs. Their satiric, tongue-in-cheek, buoyant pretending is highly effective. Miss Swanson, by the way, looks like an ingenue. It was almost impossible for us to believe that we'd ever seen her in the silent films of yore.

Robert Strauss, as a drunken, insulting, ruthless producer's henchman, and Donald Foster, as a harassed general manager, are excellent. Salutes also are due Robert Carroll, Paula Bauersmith, Betty Bartley, Ralph Bunker, William Lynn, P. Jay Sidney, Burton Mallory, Eva Leonard-Boyne, Werner Klemperer and Leon Askin.

Carroll has one of the finest, most resonant voices of any of our current actors. We'd like to see him get a good Shakespearean role one of these days. He ought to be able to make the Bard's verse sing.

Ferrer, in addition to costarring with Miss Swanson, also has directed the lusty romp at the necessarily speedy pace. Wolfgang Roth has designed an accurate setting.

Members of the first audience had a good time. Their laughter and applause were appreciative and robust. They were particularly generous with their palm pats for Miss Swanson and Ferrer, as they should have been.

"Out of This World"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
December 22, 1950

Visiting Olympus With Mr. Porter

By Richard Watts Jr.

Pay no attention to the rumors that the new Cole Porter show, "Out of This World," was having a lot of trouble on the road. Maybe it was, but there were no signs of it at the Century Theatre last night, where the latest version of the Amphitryon story had its elaborate local premiere. Now, its birth pangs behind it, "Out of This World" is a fine, beautiful and imaginative musical comedy, with attractive and characteristic Porter songs, a handsome production, some splendidly dynamic dancing, an attractive cast, and a good story that is an excellent combination of the humorous and the romantic. It is first-rate entertainment.

Being a person of superior culture, you, of course, know the Amphitryon legend, in which Jupiter, looking down from Olympus, sees a handsome young woman on earth, and comes down to make love to her after disguising himself as the lady's absent husband. The current adapters of the tale have transformed the girl into a modern American, but manage to transport their narrative to Greece in proper fashion. Jupiter's was perhaps not the most ethical of tricks for even a pagan deity to play, but the authors have managed to present their fable so skillfully that they not only get all the possible sex comedy out of it but also a lot of romantic charm.

Juno's Mistake

Although "Out of This World" is not what could be termed hilarious in its humor, there is an excellent vein of comic invention in it, in a sly and imaginative way. I liked, for example, the idea of having Juno, who knows the kind of thing her husband is usually up to, feel sure that he is going to adopt some sort of disguise and mistake an American gangster, hiding out in the Greek hills, for the mighty Jupiter. And I enjoyed equally well the scheme of having the assembled gods and goddesses sing a mountain melody of the hillbilly school, since the mountain they are singing of happens to be Mount Olympus.

This is, among other things, the season in which co-producers of musical shows are making fine contributions to the visual beauty of their productions by their gift for scenic design. Last week Oliver Smith gave us the splendid settings for his revue, "Bless You All." Now Lemuel Ayers adds notably to the excellence of his co-production of "Out of This World" by the lovely and colorful sets and costumes he has provided for it. The dances, staged by the talented Hanya Holm, also add to the beauty and excitement of the evening, particularly in the numbers done by a wonderfully lithe girl named Janet Collins, as the goddess of Night.

The Porter Score

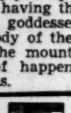
It is pretty late in this review to be getting around to the Cole Porter songs. This is a characteristic, rather than an exceptional, Porter score, but that is by no means to speak slightingly of it. There may be something a trifle familiar about the tunes and the music of the new show, but they are always a pleasure to listen to. At the moment, I remember particularly "No Lover for Me," beautifully sung by Priscilla Gillette, a typical Porter comedy song called "Cherry Pies Ought to Be You," and an especially characteristic number in which William Redfield, as Mercury, sings of the merits of various romantic ladies of history and legend.

All of the performers are of vast assistance. Charlotte Greenwood, returning to the local musical comedy stage for the first time since 1927, is in her best old-time form as Juno. Priscilla Gillette, who made such a fine impression last season in "Regina," sings and acts delightfully as the girl pursued by Jupiter. William Eythe has never before revealed the skill he shows as the husband and the disguised Jupiter, and George Jongeyans is impressive as the undisguised god. Mr. Redfield is an engaging Mercury, while David Burns, a good comic, is excellent as the gangster, and Barbara Ashley is of great help as his daugher. I had a good time.

"OUT OF THIS WORLD"

Musical comedy with book by Dwight Taylor, Reginald Lawrence and F. Hugh Herbert; songs by Cole Porter; staged by Agnes de Mille and George Abbott; choreography by Hanya Holm; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; musical director, Pembroke Davenport; orchestrations, Robert Russell Bennett; presented by Saint Subber and Mr. Ayers at the Century Theatre, December 21, 1950. The cast:

Mercury.....William Redfield
Jupiter.....George Jongeyans
Helen.....Priscilla Gillette
Waiter.....Frank Milton
Art O'Malley....William Eythe
Night.....Janet Collins
Vulcania.....Peggy Rea
Juno.....Charlotte Greenwood
Chloe.....Barbara Ashley
Niki Skolianos.....David Burns
Strephon.....Ray Harrison



New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun
December 22, 1950

Gods Step Off Olympus in Musical

Juno Brings House Down

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Musical.
Topic—Gods on earth.
Spirit—Deliberately frank.
Virtue—Visual splendor.
Weakness—Patchiness.
In sum—Cheery, but no must.

"Out of This World" makes the sort of evening's entertainment that is perfectly pleasant and involves no superlatives. Ten years ago, I think, it would have been a crashing hit. Now that cohesion, uniformity and clever transitions are the fashion in musicals, this book show's revue characteristics put it in a take-it or-leave-it-alone class.

The entire affair stems from the well known Amphytrion legend, in which Jupiter impersonates a mortal husband. The usual mixed identity complications ensue.

The earthly bridegroom here is tracking down a Greek dope manufacturer, to expose him in a magazine. Juno suspects the Greek of being Jupiter in disguise, and latches onto him.

Shuffled and Reshuffled.

The general trend of the plot is to include as many extramarital flings as possible, and to remate the characters properly in the end. There is one romance between Mercury and a girl named Chloe, who in this shuffle gets as lost as the girl by the same name in the song.

Charlotte Greenwood is starred a. Juno. The makers of the show have wisely let her stick to her own trusty style in song and dance. She got a deafening hand last night, just for heaving into sight. This is her first musical in 23 years, and not an angle or a muscle of her seems changed.

In the end, when she flung herself into her famous eccentric dancing, the audience all but tore the place down.

Neither the book nor the songs, pleasant though many of them are, seem of any vast assistance to the other cast members in exploiting the characters they portray. William Eythe is the bridegroom, and later plays himself possessed by the eager Jupiter. This is a difficult switch, since so little has been seen of the original god. Certainly Eythe is personable and energetic.

Bored Immortal.

William Redfield has a more rewarding assignment as Mercury, which he plays with the unruffled confidence of a bored young immortal. He sings most effectively, halting the performance with "They Couldn't Compare to You."

Last night's audience, in fact, was out to stop the show on innumerable occasions. It forced a complete hitch in the routine, for a striking dance by Janet Collins as Night, and but for intermission would have done the same for the violent and rapturous ballet that ends the first act. Here was directness of intention and unhesitating statement that cast an erotic spell, where mere suggestiveness would

have been offensive.

Priscilla Gillette is a comely bride, and sings three of the score's best songs ("Imagination," "I Am Loved," and "No Lover for Me") in what seemed to me rather a grand manner. Barbara Ashley is warmly attractive as the innocent Chloe, and got one of the evening's better ovations for her singing of "Where, oh Where?"

David Burns has a special brand of madness for parts such as the dope trafficker here, and makes the most of being victimized by Miss Greenwood. George Jongeyans is splendid looking, and authoritative in music and speech as Jupiter, but he has too little opportunity.

Pagan Innocence.

The male dancing chorus is almost as unhampered by godlike raiment as the customers in a steam bath. Hanya Holm has directed them to create a kind of pagan innocence, which is not usually characteristic of the show's humor.

Generally lovely to see, the show has several scenes which literally knock your breath out. The Olympian Hall, the expanse of sky, the grove, and the brief pageant of Daybreak are all vastly beautiful.

As a slow absorber of new tunes I find it difficult to say much about Cole Porter's scores this quickly. There are some real nice melodies, but it is no "Kiss Me Kate." Neither is the rest of the show.

Journal American

December 22, 1950

Not Cole Porter's Best But a Hit Nevertheless

By JOHN McCLAIN

In Cole Porter's new musical, "Out of This World," which opened at the New Century Theatre last night, there is a gangling and engaging lady named Charlotte Greenwood, whose legs apparently emerge from her shoulder blades and whose arms hang to her ankles.

She made quite a career of these eccentricities as a dancer in various musicals 20-odd years ago and more recently in a series of Hollywood movie extravaganzas, and so last night everybody waited patiently for the nostalgic number to reappear.

Well, everybody waited through the entire show and until the spot next-to-closing. And then Miss Greenwood got out and did something called "Nobody's Chasing Me," winding up with the incredible kicks, and of course the balcony buckled and the roof came off the theatre.

I don't think the song and lyric are especially noteworthy, but they don't have to be. Her projection and personality are enough to make the evening worth-while.

In fact, come to think about it, the two hours leading up to this number are pretty worthwhile themselves. This is a magnificently-mounted, swiftly-paced production all the way from the opening gong, and it concerns a theme of sufficient importance that if it failed to come off it could have laid the largest egg in the history of the poultry business.

You can't mix up Greek gods and mortals, as they do here, without the risk of terrible trouble. To me the idea faltered at times but I think they finally got away with it.

The idea is, simply, that Jupiter has generated an ungodly yen for Priscilla Gillette, an earthling who has just been married to William Eythe.

He sends his son, Mercury, down to earth to arrange a rendezvous. When this is indeed effected, somewhere in Greece, Jupiter is obliged to acquire temporarily the mortal figure and vestments of the bridegroom and to spend an evening, thus disguised, in the presence of the bride.

He eventually returns to Mt. Olympus, greatly relieved, and the unsuspecting bride returns to her young husband, convinced that she has just awakened from a pleasant dream.

The festivities concurrent with the plot involve some fair comedy by Miss Greenwood, as Juno, wife of Jupiter; fine performances by Miss Gillette as the bride, William Redfield, as Mercury, Bill Eythe as the bridegroom, George Jongeyans as Jupiter, David Burns, as Niki Skolianos, a rather thinly disguised portrait of somebody like "Lucky" Luciano, and Barbara Ashley as Chloe.

The choreography by Miss Hanya Holm is always swift and sympathetic to both the earth and the astral ways, and the settings and costumes of Lemuel Ayres are equally ingenious and complimentary. Janet Collins, who does quite a spot of dancing and dialogue as "Night," is excellent.

Coming back to Cole Porter, and his book and lyrics, I can only submit that they are sub-standard although always adequate. As we all know, he is incapable of writing an entirely dreary verse or an offensive tune, but I hoped that he would come up with something more auspicious. Much of it seemed so reminiscent of other, more laudable, scores.

It would be eminently unfair to give sole direction credit to Miss Agnes De Mille, or George Abbott (who got no billing), any more than it would to hold Dwight Taylor and Reginald Lawrence entirely responsible for all the lines, since it is no secret that the entire effort underwent drastic changes in the few weeks prior to its opening here.

But maybe that doesn't matter too much. Because I think the show is a hit.

DAILY NEWS

December 22, 1950

Lemuel Ayers, Set Designer, Top Performer in 'Out of This World'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As a physical production, with its breathtaking scenery, fine dances and dancers, delightful costumes, and with its admirable cast, Cole Porter's new musical, "Out of This World," is as ecstatic as its title. As a musical play it is rather ordinary and aimless—a seemingly belated endorsement of sex by Mr. Porter and his collaborators on the libretto, Dwight Taylor and Reginald Lawrence.

The program of "Out of This World," which had a fashionable premiere at the Century Theatre last evening (the man across the aisle from me was wearing a monocle and the Duke and Dukess were a few rows ahead)—the program, I started to say, bills Charlotte Greenwood as the star. This I will not object to, for Miss Greenwood is present in person and as intact as she ever was, which is not very. Those legs and arms are as loose and aimless as ever, and I am sure that the only man fit to be a partner for Miss Greenwood in one of her shows would be Bernarr Macfadden.

Mr. Ayers Is Best.

But, putting aside my great admiration and affection for Miss Greenwood and for the way she delivers a couple of Mr. Porter's smart songs, I'd say that the top star of "Out of This World" is one of its two producers, Lemuel Ayers, who is the set and costume designer. When he co-produced "Kiss Me, Kate," Mr. Ayers went for artistic inspiration to ancient Italy, and his decor was—and is—splendid. For the investiture of "Out of This World" Mr. Ayers has traveled to ancient Greece and beyond to the summit of Mount Olympus, where the old gods dwelt. You will not see again for some time so many lovely sets, costumes, curtains and drops, or such good lighting.

Next in my own list of stars I'd put Mr. Porter, who has written some nice songs, and Russell Bennett, Trudi Rittman and Genevieve Pitot, who created the orchestrations for Mr. Porter's music. And then I'd salute Pembroke Davenport, the musical conductor, and the best pit orchestra any side of the Metropolitan Opera House.

Another Greek Myth.

The plot of "Out of This World" is a slight version of the Amphytrion legend, in which Jupiter, the god of gods, becomes interested in the very mortal and therefore attractive wife of an American newsmagazine reporter. He sends Sonnyboy Mercury down from Olympus to fix things up for him, and it is just one more headache for his wife, Juno. Juno (Miss Greenwood) has been accustomed to this kind of adventuring for several centuries, so her jealousy is tempered by good-humored cynicism.

If I were to go into further detail about the plot—about how the mortal wife comes at last to prefer her mortal husband over the splendid and potent Jupiter—I'd be betraying its weakness. For it is a cumbersome plot and not too funny or romantic.

The performers are diverting. David Burns has some amusing moments as a Chicago mobster who has retired to his native Greece. Priscilla Gillette is attractive and interesting as the wife—interesting because she is a contralto instead of a soprano, which is unusual in the music-show business. William Eythe plays with zest and good style two roles—himself as a mortal and Jupiter, the god, impersonating himself. A slender and lovely elf, Janet Collins, is remarkably good as the principal dancer, and all of Hanya Holm's dances and dancers are excellent. Agnes de Mille and George Abbott are responsible for the over-all production.